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Penal substitution and the possibility of unconditional hospitality*

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Abstract

Traditional atonement theories (and especially penal readings of the atonement) are being challenged because they seem to be based on divine violence and thus seem to condone or contribute to human violence rather than enable human practices of hospitality. In the face of such criticism, this paper argues that attempts to eliminate all violence from atonement theology do not contribute to the flourishing of hospitality but imply an erasing of boundaries necessary to counter unjustified violence and to safeguard the possibility of God's eschatological hospitality. Specifically, the paper critiques three stepping stones used in the defence of non-violent theories of the atonement. They are (1) the definition of violence as inherently negative, to which the paper opposes the possibility of the Augustinian notion of justified violence as an act of love; (2) the 'fall model' of Constantinianism which erroneously regards penal atonement theories as the outcome of the fourth-century Christianizing of the Roman Empire; and (3) the abandoning not just of penal atonement theories, but necessarily of each of the three main models, since each defends God's involvement in violence. The paper then argues that a penal aspect is indispensable to safeguard both God's absolute eschatological hospitality and its incarnation in human relationships.

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing atonement theology today is the quest for hospitality: is the cross an irredeemable instance of divine violence that in turn justifies human suffering and abuse, or can we see in the cross the beckoning horizon of God's eschatological hospitality? The last few decades have witnessed a turn against theories of the atonement that involve God in violence. Hospitality and violence are seen as conflicting with one another, and it seems obviously better to choose divine hospitality than it would be to opt for divine violence.

* A shortened version of this paper was delivered to the Evangelical Theology Group meeting at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (23 November 2002). I particularly value the feedback that I received on this paper from Dr Craig Allert, Dr Kent Clarke, and Dr Doug Harink.

The challenge to traditional theories of the atonement has come from a number of different quarters. First, postmodern philosophers have emphasized the demand for pure or unconditional hospitality. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida has opposed the limitations and conditions that modernity has placed on hospitality. Derrida, rightly in my view, regards hospitality as an eschatological concept. He sees hospitality as a radical, absolute opening toward the future. The result of such hospitality may be terrible, Derrida acknowledges, 'because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil.'¹ Hospitality must be unconditional, to the point of teetering on the brink of violence and chaos. And, just as we don't know who the unexpected visitor might be, so we don't know what the messianic future might look like. Fear of the violence of particular messianisms – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – has set Derrida on the course of his quest for an indeterminate messianicity.² It implies an entirely indeterminate future: our openness to the future is 'without horizon of expectation'. Hospitality, always entirely indeterminate in its radical openness, is a messianic ideal that will never and can never be realized in a violent world. In Caputo's words, 'If the *tout autre* ever won the revolution, if the Messiah ever actually showed up, if you ever thought that justice has come – that would ruin everything.'³

Derrida's understanding of hospitality is not without its problems: his demand for pure hospitality means that I must be open for the most violent of all – the devil himself – to come in; and his closed universe implies that absolute hospitality always remains a far-off ideal and that we always remain condemned to violence.⁴ Nonetheless, Derrida's challenge for the Christian atonement tradition is this: can we continue to confess God's unbounded, pure, unconditional hospitality while at the same time acknowledging divine involvement, some kind of divine violence, in the crucifixion itself?

¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 70. Cf. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 145; Jacques Derrida, with Alexander Garcia Düttmann, 'Perhaps or Maybe', in *Responsibilities of Deconstruction*, ed. Jonathon Dronsfield and Nick Midgley, *PLI: Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1997), pp. 9, 13; Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 77.

² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 59.

³ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 74.

⁴ Cf. Hans Boersma, 'Irenaeus, Derrida and Hospitality: On the Eschatological Overcoming of Violence', *Modern Theology* 19 (2003), pp. 163–80.

The difficulty of reconciling traditional models of the atonement with the absolute hospitality of God has led a number of theologians to abandon them in their search for alternatives. The idea that an angry deity would demand the death of his Son has led to Rita Nakashima Brock's well-known charge that traditional models involve God in 'cosmic child abuse'.⁵ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker have rejected the history of atonement theology as 'an abusive theology that glorifies suffering', particularly for women and children.⁶ Darby Kathleen Ray has argued that the traditional Anselmian and Abelardian models 'have bequeathed contemporary Christians with a highly problematic doctrine of atonement'.⁷ Neither of these theories, says Ray, assists us in recognizing and confronting the power of evil in the lives of many women, men, and children. Both models have 'deadly consequences'.⁸ She points specifically to the genocides and the massacres of colonialism, which would not have been possible without a theology to sustain it.⁹

Although it is not only the Anselmian and penal substitutionary models that are undergoing serious criticism, it is fair to say that they are considered particularly vulnerable to the charge of sustaining human violence. Doesn't the notion of retribution lend itself to the justification of a strict economy of exchange, which undermines the possibility of any true hospitality? In particular, isn't there a direct line from penal substitutionary views of the atonement to our North American retributive justice system that does not allow for the restoration of relationships and so for true shalom between the offender, the victim, and the entire community?¹⁰ Concern for the oppressed

⁵ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p. 56. The charge of divine child abuse is echoed in J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 127–9, 141, 151, 178.

⁶ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?', in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), p. 26.

⁷ Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1998), p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰ E.g. Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Pierre Allard and Wayne Northey, 'Christianity: The Rediscovery of Restorative Justice', in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, ed. Michael L. Hadley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 119–41; Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Auckland: Lime Grove House, 2001); T. Richard Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

and marginalized has led many to a serious critique of traditional atonement theologies, and of penal views of the atonement in particular.

My argument in this paper is that attempts to eliminate all violence from atonement theology do not contribute to the flourishing of hospitality but imply an erasing of boundaries that are necessary to put a stop to unjustified violence and to safeguard the possibility of God's eschatological hospitality. I will first critique three important stepping stones used in the defence of non-violent theories of the atonement. They are (1) the definition of violence as inherently negative; (2) the 'fall model' of Constantinianism; and (3) the abandoning of each of the three main models of the atonement. I will then argue why a penal aspect is indispensable to safeguard both God's absolute eschatological hospitality and its incarnation in human relationships.

Defining violence as inherently negative

In his recent book, *The Nonviolent Atonement*,¹¹ J. Denny Weaver advocates a non-violent resistance. His arguments build on Walter Wink's well-known advocacy of non-violence in his book *Engaging the Powers*.¹² Here Wink attempts to establish a third way between just war theories associated with Augustine and a radical pacifism or non-resistance that rejects all use of force or coercion. The cycle of revenge, argues Wink, is inherent in the use of violence: 'Violence inculcates the longing for revenge, and for what the losers call "justice." And they will have learned from our example how to use violence more efficiently. Violence can never stop violence because its very success leads others to imitate it.'¹³ Wink opposes all use of what he terms 'redemptive violence'. He does not believe, however, that this rejection of violence leaves us without any means of opposing evil. He argues that Jesus' 'third way' beyond just war and pacifism is not

averse to using coercion. His way aims at converting the opponent; failing that, it hopes for accommodation, where the opponent is willing to make some changes simply to get the protesters off his back. But if that too fails, nonviolence entails coercion: the opponent is forced to make a change rather than suffer the loss of power, even though he remains hostile. But Jesus' way does not employ violent coercion.¹⁴

¹¹ See n. 5 above.

¹² Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984). See also Wink's popularized version, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998).

¹³ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, p. 216. Italics in original.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192. Italics in original.

Wink's non-violent coercion takes on a rather militaristic tone when he not only speaks of 'coercion' as a legitimate part of Jesus' 'third way', but when he refers to it as a 'militant nonviolence' and as a 'highly aggressive' nonviolence.¹⁵ Despite his opposition to the Augustinian just war theory, Wink even wishes success to those who in desperation resort to counter-violence.¹⁶

It seems to me that two critical comments are in order. First, it is not clear why Wink and Weaver insist so strongly on limiting active resistance to non-physical methods, while condoning physical interference in other cases (such as stopping a child from crossing the street).¹⁷ By what standard would one interpret as violent the physical resistance offered to an enemy but as non-violent the physical interference used to stop a person from committing suicide? If my interference with a suicide takes the form of a physical encounter, is this not a form of violence? Most people would probably justify their (physical) interference with an appeal to the greater good of rescuing the suicidal person from death. In other words, some minor degree of physical harm may be necessary at times to avoid what we consider a much worse prospect. Clearly, there are situations in which most people believe it is justified to inflict physical harm or injury.

Second, Weaver argues that social structures that impose poverty are violent (and hence morally wrong), while economic boycotts and strikes can be acceptable non-violent acts of active resistance. Interestingly, here we are crossing into the area of non-physical aggression, and most people will agree that at least some of this non-physical aggression is violent. Again, while I might well agree with Weaver's moral evaluation of specific instances, by what standard are immoral social structures violent and economic boycotts and strikes non-violent? Do the latter not cause harm? It seems to me that they do.¹⁸ In fact, we employ these means precisely *because* they inflict harm. The point is that we find the harm acceptable under certain circumstances. If we only want to refer to morally reprehensible or unacceptable harm as violence, this is of course possible – as long as we acknowledge that there

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁶ Wink's suggestion that the victory of counter-violence might 'usher in a better society' (ibid., p. 224) clashes with his notion that all violence is mimetic in character and is therefore always self-defeating.

¹⁷ For this and other examples, see Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. Leo D. Lefebure, 'Victims, Violence and the Sacred: The Thought of René Girard', *Christian Century* 113 (11 Dec 1996), p. 1229: 'At what point do economic sanctions that result in the deaths of children become an act of war? Buddhists pondering the First Precept note that if you boil water, you commit an act of violence against the microorganisms in it.'

are situations in which both physical and non-physical harm are acceptable, and even morally required. For the sake of consistency, I prefer to refer to all such acts of damage or injury (including the morally acceptable ones) as violence.

Any use of force or coercion that involves some kind of hurt or injury – whether the coercion is physical or non-physical – is a form of violence. But it is not by that very fact morally reprehensible. Following St Augustine, Donald Burt suggests that violence may under certain circumstances be an act of ‘ordered love’. The key is that the violent act must have in mind the lessening of violence: ‘For example, mandatory vaccination against small pox (“injurious” in the sense of being an invasion of bodily integrity and a lessening of individual freedom) may prevent a much greater quantity of “injury” coming from a deadly plague.’¹⁹ Burt does not intend to glorify violence, but in true Augustinian fashion he opposes the notion that violence always begets more violence. Just war theorists have always maintained that the consideration of intent – particularly the purpose of re-establishing peace – is an important consideration in the justification of violence.²⁰ In an imperfect world, violence (the infliction of harm or injury) is at times the only option and as such a moral obligation and an act of love.

Even if the use of violence is necessary, it is of course still possible that people will use it with the wrong motivation or in the wrong fashion. In his *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, St Augustine comments:

The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act, or to make others act in this way.²¹

Augustine decries here the *love* of violence – not every act of violence as such – as something that must be opposed. The Augustinian perspective would unequivocally condemn people engaging in violence out of purely sadistic

¹⁹ Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 164.

²⁰ Cf. James Turner Johnson, *Morality and Contemporary Warfare* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 41–51.

²¹ St Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff (1887; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 301 (22.74).

pleasure or for the satisfaction that retribution may offer. Not all violence is justified. Marjorie Suchocki makes a similar point when she argues that violence is sinful whenever it is unnecessary.²² Violence may be unavoidable and even morally required under certain circumstances. But it needs to be avoided and countered as much as possible. Unnecessary injury is morally reprehensible.

Justified violence, in an Augustinian paradigm, is an act of love. The practice of hospitality, therefore, does not exclude all violence. Derrida has already alerted us to the fact that in our world it is strictly speaking impossible to extend hospitality without at the same time also engaging in some violence. Now we see that there is a significant theological tradition that argues that the use of this violence is not always wrong. If hospitality is to be practised at all, a certain degree of violence is unavoidable.

Constantine and the 'fall model'

It is often assumed that the early church's Christus Victor motif fell out of favour due to the Constantinian arrangement in the fourth century.²³ Once the church lost its sense of confrontation with the world, the Christus Victor imagery of confrontation no longer made sense. Although Anselm's theory of the atonement, propounded in his *Cur Deus Homo*, did not receive immediate universal consent, gradually it replaced the traditional Christus Victor model. Comments Weaver:

[A]lthough the change was gradual, there did come a time when discussing atonement in terms that assumed confrontation between church and social order no longer made sense. Narrative Christus Victor disappeared from the picture when the church came to support the world's social order, to accept the intervention of political authorities in churchly affairs, and to look to political authorities for support and protection.²⁴

Weaver argues that the change in atonement theology was the result of the Constantinianizing of the church, which he sees embodied particularly in the councils of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451). He argues that these

²² Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 95.

²³ E.g. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. edn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 211; Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), p. 47; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), p. 125; Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, pp. 81–6.

²⁴ Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, pp. 86–7.

theological formulas meant the abandonment of ethics in favour of ontology and led to a focus on Jesus' death at the cost of a concern for what he did and taught throughout his life on earth. The outcome was an atonement theology that was juridicized (defining atonement with the help of a legal paradigm rather than focusing on ethical transformation), individualized (concerned only with individuals, no longer with systemic, structural problems), and de-historicized (ignoring the biblical narrative structure of salvation). Building in part on the work of John Howard Yoder, Weaver concludes that this 'approach to atonement reflects a church that has reached accommodation of violence within the social order, a church in which the Christian life of ordinary lay people resembles the minimal expectations of polite society'.²⁵ Thus, for Weaver, the Anselmian theory of the atonement, built on the Constantinian arrangement, is the culprit behind the loss of hospitality and has enabled violence to take root in the Christian tradition.

I am appreciative of Weaver's emphasis on narrative, on institutional and structural issues, and on ethical transformation. His reconstruction, however, contains several historical and theological flaws.²⁶ If the Constantinian arrangement of the fourth century was indeed responsible for the demise of the Christus Victor theme, why did it take until the eleventh century before the Anselmian model appeared as a viable alternative? One cannot help but wonder what happened in the intermediate 700 years of development. Furthermore, the Constantinian arrangement can hardly be held responsible for Nicea's and Chalcedon's static or ontological approach to questions about the person of Christ. The Arianizing party, denying the full divinity of Jesus Christ, was far cosier with the imperial powers than the Athanasian party whose views were enshrined as orthodox. Those who held to the Nicene faith tended to be wary of the state's influence in the church, and particularly of the heterodox influence that tended to flourish in the context of a close church-state relationship. In a couple of well-known articles in 1951, George Huntston Williams argued that the Arian party had difficulty accepting that the church was ruled directly by Christ. The fourth-century bishop Eusebius (c.260–340), sympathetic to the Arian cause, 'was unable to make a clear distinction between the Church founded by the Incarnate Logos and the Empire – once its ruler had become Christian'.²⁷ Since the Arians saw Christ

²⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁶ For a careful critique of Weaver's position, see Thomas Finger, 'Christus Victor and the Creeds: Some Historical Considerations', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72 (1998), pp. 31–51.

²⁷ George Huntston Williams, 'Christology and Church-State Relations in the Fourth Century', *Church History* 20/3 (1951), p. 17.

as merely like God, it became easier for them to view the positions of Christ and the emperor as similar. The difference between the two was no longer as significant, and the emperor's authority in the church was more readily accepted alongside the authority of Christ. All in all, the Arians tended to accept more easily than the Nicene party the power of the emperor in church affairs. According to Williams, there is a connection 'between the Arian preference for Christological subordination and the Arian disposition to subordinate the Church to the State'.²⁸

The 'fall model' of historiography – the view that regards Constantine's embrace of Christianity as the fall of the Church – has undergone a detailed and careful critique in a recent publication by D. H. Williams. The author argues that the 'fall model' is built on an erroneous understanding of the history of the church and has caused permanent historical damage.²⁹ He alleges that the renunciation of Constantinianism has meant 'an abdication – tacitly or explicitly – from the theological and spiritual history of the post-apostolic church'.³⁰ The 'fall model' ignores the historical continuity between the patristic era and the period after Constantine. Much of the criticism of Constantinianism, says Williams, also 'ignores the multiple ways [in] which Christian leaders and churches faithfully preserved doctrinal orthodoxy apart from, and sometimes in opposition to, prevailing imperial power'.³¹

A curious illustration of the continuity of Constantinian Christianity with the faith of the early Fathers can be found in Constantine's use of the cross as a symbol of victory. Eusebius's well-known story of the emperor's conversion to Christianity, in his *Life of Constantine* (337), relates the account of Constantine's vision on the eve of the battle at the Milvian Bridge:

[Constantine] said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS. At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole

²⁸ Ibid., p. 10. For similar arguments, see Erik Peterson, 'Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem', in *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951), pp. 88–105; Yves Congar, 'Classical Political Monotheism and the Trinity', *Concilium* 143 (1981), pp. 31–6.

²⁹ D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 111.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

³¹ Ibid., p. 130.

army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle.³²

Scholars will no doubt continue to debate the integrity of Constantine's conversion. But it is at least clear that Constantine regarded the cross as a military symbol. He was able to interpret the cross this way because of the traditional Christus Victor theme of the atonement. Ian Gillman has presented fascinating additional evidence from Eusebius that illustrates the connection between Constantine's understanding of the meaning of the cross and his military endeavours. After the vision, Constantine reportedly sought Christian interpreters of the vision, who affirmed 'that the sign which had appeared was the symbol of immortality, and the trophy of that victory over death which He had gained in time past when sojourning on earth'.³³ Gillman concludes that

the cross was the meaningful symbol of the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness and death. It was the sign of the power of Christ still at work in the world, the symbol which caught up into itself all that theologians had struggled to express when dealing with soteriology. When Constantine referred to the cross, these are the connotations which must be kept in mind³⁴

Doctrinal development always displays both continuity and discontinuity. In the case of Constantine, it is evident that he retained a powerful link with the traditional Christus Victor theme of the atonement. Constantine, or at least the historian Eusebius, did not see a discrepancy between the Christus Victor theme of the atonement and an imperial embrace of the Christian faith. Weaver's claim that the Christus Victor theme depended on a situation of confrontation between church and state³⁵ is simply not borne out by the facts. Constantine drew on the Christus Victor tradition to underwrite his imperial power. The Christus Victor theme does not lend itself to easy domestication in the service of a stance of non-violent opposition to the existing structures of society. Constantine's use of the cross as a symbol of military victory and power illustrates that the danger of using the cross as

³² Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (1890; reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:490 (1.28).

³³ *Ibid.*, 1:491 (1.32).

³⁴ Ian Gillman, 'Constantine the Great in the Light of the Christus Victor Concept', *Journal of Religious History* 1 (1961), p. 200.

³⁵ Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, p. 86.

a symbol of violence is by no means limited to the Anselmian strand of atonement theology.

Non-violence and the traditional atonement models

The three main strands of atonement theology – Christus Victor, moral influence, and penal substitution – differ in significant ways. It is important to note, however, that regardless of how we associate God with the cross – battling the devil, demonstrating his love, punishing his Son – God somehow gets associated with violence. Each of the three main theological traditions of the Christian faith appears to associate God with violence. As we have seen, it is particularly the penal substitutionary view of the atonement (which we could describe as the Reformation’s sub-model of the Anselmian satisfaction model) that bears the brunt of the criticism. Since the Anselmian tradition has been a main player in Western atonement theology, it is understandable that the fingers are pointing in its direction. And it is certainly true that the Anselmian model (and penal substitution) involves God in violence: in this model, God sends his Son to the earth in order to punish him for the sins of the world.

The classical or Christus Victor model of the atonement, however, also involves God in violence. Here we have God making a deal with the devil (paying him a ransom for the freedom of human beings), deceiving him (tricking the devil into thinking that Jesus was a mere human being), or actually fighting with and conquering the powers and principalities on the cross. In her recent book, *Deceiving the Devil*, Darby Kathleen Ray makes a plea for the early church’s notion of divine trickery. Her position is not too different from accepting the need for occasional violence. While she interprets the idea of divine deceit and trickery as non-violence, regarding Jesus’ life as one of complete non-violence,³⁶ I am not convinced this argument is successful. Why would deceit (if used by the powerless in the struggle against evil) be justified, while (physical) violence must be unequivocally rejected?³⁷ Indeed, it is precisely the fact that the traditional Christus Victor theme implicates God in deceptive violence that has traditionally been one of the main objections to it. In the traditional Christus Victor theme, God has a purpose in the cross, leading to a divine involvement that many regard as morally ambiguous, and that may well be used to justify human violence.

³⁶ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, pp. 141, 144.

³⁷ Ray’s argument is especially questionable in light of the fact that she adopts what she calls a ‘tragic view’ of reality, which recognizes that there is no universal morality grounded in absolute foundations, and which recognizes the ‘moral ambiguity’ of the world in which ‘none of our decisions or actions is innocent’ (ibid., pp. 112, 141).

Even the Abelardian moral influence theory, though it may seem to be the most hospitable one, involves God in violence with regard to the crucifixion. It is by sacrificing his Son that God intends to invoke a human response of love and wants to draw human beings into his reconciling love.³⁸ If Christ voluntarily suffered and sacrificed himself to the point of death, does this not lead to human self-sacrifice? Does this not necessarily perpetuate abusive structures? Ray rejects the Abelardian tradition because 'the salvific values of suffering, self-sacrifice, and obedience are too easily distorted into a theological tool of subjugation'.³⁹ Brock and Parker also reject this tradition because of its glorification of suffering. Says Parker, 'My religious community, most of all, could not see violence against children because it could not name clearly the violence that happened to Jesus. Even liberal protestantism called Jesus' death on the cross an example of love that disciples were to imitate.'⁴⁰ Weaver discounts the moral theory because here 'God the Father sent his most precious possession to die in order to display an ultimately loving act. Apparently the death of Jesus has no salvific purpose in this motif if it is not God-intended.'⁴¹ Indeed, we need to be clear that penal views are not the only ones involving God in violence. All traditional theories do so. It is only by radically limiting Christ's redemptive role to his life rather than his death (so that his life only becomes an example to us) or by absolutely dissociating God from any role in the cross (turning the crucifixion into a solely human or demonic act) that we can avoid dealing with the difficulty of divine violence. All traditional interpretations of the cross are faced with the difficult task of accounting for the relationship between divine violence and the atonement.

Penal atonement and eschatological hospitality

At this juncture, I want to come to the defence of traditional atonement theology. In particular, I want to make the case that by including a penal aspect in our view of the atonement we adopt an element that plays a role in safeguarding God's eschatological hospitality. So, rather than being responsible for divine and human violence, a penal aspect, if properly described,

³⁸ Of course, the Abelardian motivation for the death of Christ (to evoke a response of love) may seem more laudable than the Anselmian motivation (satisfaction of God's honour or law). From the perspective of the victim, however, the motivation for violence may not make a great deal of difference.

³⁹ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2001), p. 199. Cf. p. 41.

⁴¹ Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, p. 73.

erects boundaries against unnecessary violence and enables the flourishing of hospitality.

In order to describe this penal aspect in appropriate ways, I want to make two preliminary comments. First, I do not advocate a penal theory at the cost of other theories of the atonement. I do not have the space here to describe how I view the relationship between the various models, but suffice it to say that I believe that the three strands are complementary.⁴² Second, penal theories of the atonement have indeed functioned in unwholesome ways, particularly within my own Reformed tradition. Traditional protestant understandings of the atonement have indeed fallen prey to the pitfalls of juridicizing, individualizing, and dehistoricizing the atonement. Traditional protestant readings of St Paul tend to belittle hospitality because they tend to work with a strict economy of exchange: the covenantal relationship between God and human beings takes on strongly contractual connotations.⁴³ Too often, the impression is given that the stranger secures a place in the home not through an unconditional gift but by means of a contractual agreement (with the elect being allotted to Christ on the basis of his agreement to suffer in their stead). In Derridean terms, the conditionality of violence has tended to overtake the unconditionality of absolute hospitality.

It is quite possible, however, to retain a penal aspect to the atonement while avoiding some of these drawbacks. Not everything juridical necessarily falls under the 'juridicizing' rubric. Legal and penal aspects are found throughout the scriptures – it is just that they are not the only or even the ultimate metaphor to describe the divine – human relationship. The Mosaic covenant was an arrangement that God made not with one individual but with an entire nation. The covenant curse of exile was therefore threatened against the entire nation. The Deuteronomic law insisted that Israel *as a whole* – despite the uprightness of individual believers – would consistently reject the very aim of repentance and sacrifice, namely, restoration of and growth in the relationship with Yahweh. The book of Deuteronomy leads up to the divine prediction of the rebellion of Israel, and of her rejection of the monotheist confession of the Shema as the heart of the law (Deut 6:4–6). The book thus leads to the culmination of exile as the curse of the law.⁴⁴ The Deuteronomic former prophets (Joshua–2 Kings) trace the apostasy of God's people, which

⁴² Cf. my forthcoming book, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁴³ Cf. James B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), pp. 51–76.

⁴⁴ Deut 28:32, 36–7, 49–52, 63–8; 29:28; 31:16–22, 29. The Song of Moses that the Israelites are to sing (Deut 32) is to function as a self-indictment.

finally results in the exilic curse.⁴⁵ Along with N. T. Wright and others, I believe that it is on the cross that Christ takes the penal curse of the law upon himself.⁴⁶ Christ is exiled on the cross.⁴⁷

Significantly, exile is God's last option. He resorts to this climactic punishment only when it becomes clear that Israel as a whole has consistently shown a refusal to repent and so to obtain forgiveness and a restoration of the relationship with Yahweh.⁴⁸ God does not delight in punishment but keeps the violence of penal force at bay as much as possible. What is more, the punishment of exile as the curse of the law serves to salvage the realization of monotheistic worship as the very heart of the law. This punishment serves the purpose of pure, eschatological hospitality: 'Punishment may be necessary . . . but it is not the pain of punishment itself that achieves justice, as though justice resides in creating equity of suffering, the pain of offenders' punishments compensating for the pain inflicted on victims. True justice resides in the restoring of relationships and the recreation of *shalom* (Rom. 5).' ⁴⁹ Restorative justice includes the need to administer punishment on occasion, while at the same time looking beyond punishment for the restoration of the community's *shalom*.

The penal substitutionary element of the atonement offers some significant insights into the way we should act in our everyday social, economic, and political realities. Derrida's notion (taken from Levinas) that in the face of the stranger we are summoned to hospitality contains a valuable element. In view of the reality of the resurrection, which is ours in hope through Jesus Christ, we are called upon today to display God's unconditional

⁴⁵ Gordon McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomistic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 65–122.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hans Boersma, 'Hospitality and Violence: The Role of Punishment in the Atonement', *Psyche en Geloof* 13 (2002), pp. 12–23.

⁴⁷ The idea that Paul saw Israel as being in exile is controversial but has received substantial support: N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 268–72; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), pp. 47–9; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 268–74; Craig A. Evans, 'Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel', in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Casey C. Newman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity/Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), pp. 77–100.

⁴⁸ Again, this is not to say that individual Israelites would not have had their relationships with God restored by the OT means of reconciliation. Scripture (in particular the Psalms) calls many people 'righteous'. The point is that Israel as a whole did not abide by Torah and its means of reconciliation.

⁴⁹ Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, p. 69.

hospitality. This summons lies at the heart of much of the NT. But we cannot leave it at this. If, in all situations, we were to open ourselves up for the other without holding back, we would institutionalize a politics of violence and abuse by our rejection of all conditions or limitations on hospitality. In Derrida's words, we would open the door not just for the good person but also for the devil to come in.⁵⁰ A penal aspect is by no means the be-all and end-all. But it is indispensable in securing some kind of hospitality. A politics of absolute hospitality and of absolute non-violence may seem appealing, but it is a recipe for a politics of the worst kind of violence. A non-violent atonement erases boundaries that are necessary to put a stop to unjustified violence and to safeguard the possibility of God's eschatological hospitality. The resurrection mandate of pure hospitality needs to be tempered, therefore, by the wisdom of conditional hospitality. Inasmuch as we are still constrained by current historical conditions, our welcome of the stranger will necessarily involve some restraint, conditionality, and thus also violence.

It seems to me that the element of restraint, conditionality, and divine violence is visible throughout the history of revelation, including the crucifixion itself. This, at least, has been the predominant view of the Christian tradition. Despite the penal aspect – divine violence if you wish – we may characterize God's action on the cross as an act of lavish hospitality. Our justification in characterizing God's action as an act of hospitality lies in the future resurrection. In his ultimate realization of absolute or pure hospitality lies God's justification of his practice of conditional hospitality in history. Practising hospitality is a difficult and painful task: it requires the wisdom of making decisions that, as Derrida rightly observes, always involve a certain degree of violence. But we dare not avoid the decision: we move on, our eyes fixed on the resurrection – the messianic future of pure hospitality.

⁵⁰ Cf. above, n. 1.